



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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RECLAIM WATERFOWL WINTERING AND NESTING AREA IN MESQUITE COUNTRY

Down in the heart of the barren mesquite country in central New Mexico, where the Rio Grande River drains the numerous arroyos flanking the ridges of the valley, lies the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most unusual sanctuaries in the United States, according to a recent Fish and Wildlife Service report received by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

This is the only area in the flyway along the entire course of the Rio Grande where sufficient natural habitat remains to enable Service engineers to convert it into a waterfowl refuge.

At one time one of the best wintering areas for migratory waterfowl in the Central Flyway, the Bosque del Apache valley with its surrounding mountainsides became almost a biological wasteland after early settlers overgrazed the area and reclaimed submarginal land for farming purposes. Today, the 56,088-acre area is of little use as a grazing land and is of comparatively little value to waterfowl and other forms of wildlife.

Under present plans, the Fish and Wildlife Service is reclaiming the area for wildlife. Dams will be built across some arroyos leading to the

valley, and the heavy June and July rainfalls will be caught and held in the newly-created waterholes which will be used by antelopes, upland game birds, and livestock. In the valley, CCC enrollees are raising dikes, creating impoundments into which water will be brought by means of drainage ditches. The impoundments will be planted with pigeongrass, sago pondweed, and other plants that provide both food and cover for waterfowl and other forms of wildlife.

"It is almost a case of creating a complete wildlife area out of a desolate wasteland," officials said. "The area is even now unusual in that it is one of the few places in the country that is potentially both a good nesting ground and an excellent wintering area."

This is one of the few important nesting areas in the United States for the New Mexico duck.

Although the refuge is still in the development stage, Refuge Manager A. D. Campbell estimates that during the summer of 1940 nesting ducks produced about 2,000 young on the area. Other nesting birds include the snowy egret, American egret, glossy ibis, Florida gallinule, New Mexico duck, ruddy duck, cinnamon teal, blue-winged teal, and mallard.

About 12,000 migratory waterfowl wintered on the refuge last year, Manager Campbell estimates. These include the Canada goose, a few snow geese, the mallard, gadwall, shoveller, ruddy duck, pintail, redhead, and canvasback.

"Once development is far enough along and we start to plant waterfowl foods, we have every expectation of increasing the total wintering and nesting populations many times more than present numbers," Campbell said.

The Rio Grande River flows directly through the center of the area and the famous stream deposits about 1/2 foot of silt on the valley floor each year. Some years ago, diggers bored down 2,400 feet in river silt before striking water. This would indicate that at one time the Rio Grande River bed was at least this much lower at this point and has been built up through the course of time.

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